

Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3

B&W MAKES BIG CLAIMS FOR THE LATEST D3 VARIATIONS ON THE 800-SERIES, WHICH FEATURE MANY CHANGES FROM THEIR PREDECESSORS. PAUL MESSENGER INVESTIGATES



If being part of the hi-fi industry has taught me anything, it has to be patience. I first visited B&W for the *800 Series Diamond* launch back last November (which I remember well as I was caught speeding en route). I then opened this file last December, in the hopes of testing B&W's claim that its new *802 D3* would match the performance of the *800 Diamond* that I use as a reference. Months passed, as *802 D3*s were apparently in very short supply (and I suspect other magazines had wanted priority; a game that I flatly refuse to play). We eventually settled on a delivery date of May 25th, so I booked lunch at the local restaurant, and also organised a pair of Townshend decoupling platforms to match the plinths and weight.

I sent an e-mail to confirm on the 24th, only to discover that each of the intended visitors had left it to the other to organise things, so the speakers themselves weren't ready; I therefore cancelled the restaurant, and postponed the review from the last issue to this. By now (halfway through July) I've obviously completely forgotten everything that was said at the original launch, but hopefully the imminent visitors should put the picture back without too much difficulty!

History

The *800 Series* actually goes way back to the original *801* in 1979, which (along with KEF's *R105*) were early UK examples of commercial dynamic speaker systems to separate the midrange and tweeter units in 'head' units. (France's Elipson was actually way ahead of the game here.) Seven stages later brings us to the five *D3*s that are being introduced in 2015/6, and which demonstrate all manner of improvements over 2010's *800 Diamonds*. Indeed, it is said that nearly nine hundred parts used in the *D3*s are new and different from those used in their *Diamond* predecessors, and that the only important ingredients in common are the terminals and (crucially no doubt) the 25mm diamond dome diaphragm that the tweeter uses. Incidentally, diamond is used here simply because it's the hardest and stiffest material around, and therefore the first dome bending frequency will be higher than any other material, at around 70kHz.

Production of the *D3 Series* models first started back in March 2015, but the launches were staggered to help the Worthing factory cope with demand, and production of the top-of-the-line *800 D3* was actually deferred for a full year. However, the *802 Diamond* was always a more popular model than its larger sibling, so this *802 D3* has been around for a number of months now. The most obvious change from its predecessor is maybe that the enclosure has been reversed, so the bass drivers are mounted into the stronger curved panels that now form the front of the bass enclosure. The flat backs now house and mount crossover networks that are fitted onto mechanically decoupled vertical panels.

Continuum Rules

Perhaps the most significant change introduced in the new *D3* models is a brand new midrange cone material called Continuum, which is much softer than Kevlar and is claimed to sound better too. Work on this material apparently actually began back in 2007, but ensuring consistency and stability has taken 'til now. Like Kevlar, Continuum is a woven material, so the radiation pattern will have similar 'octopole' characteristics – the effective radiating area reducing as frequency rises and breakup occurs. This in turn means that decent directivity should be maintained throughout its operating range. And like